WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1.   A method for coordinating an Internet-based financial transaction between an Internet merchant and a customer, the method comprising:

    receiving, with a payment network, a first information packet from the Internet merchant, the first information packet comprising a credential assigned to the customer and transaction information specifying at least a cost of the Internet-based financial transaction;

    determining from the credential, with the payment network, account information that identifies a financial account maintained by the customer at a financial institution and authorization information that allows debit access to the identified financial account;

    generating, with the payment network, a second information packet comprising the transaction information, the account information, and the authorization information; and

    transmitting, with the payment network, the second information packet to the financial institution with a request to perform a debit transaction from the identified financial account for the specified cost of the Internet-based financial transaction.

2.   The method recited in claim 1 further comprising:

    receiving, with the payment network, a response from the financial institution indicating approval or denial of the debit transaction; and

    transmitting, with the payment network, an authorization code to the Internet merchant indicating approval or denial of the Internet-based financial transaction in accordance with the response received from the financial institution.

3.   The method recited in claim 2 further comprising:

    performing, with the payment network, a risk analysis of the Internet-based financial transaction; and

    determining, with the payment network, whether to provide a guarantee of the Internet-based transaction to the Internet merchant based on the risk analysis,

    wherein the authorization code further reflects whether the guarantee is provided.

4.   The method recited in claim 1 wherein the second information packet is transmitted to the financial institution over an automated clearing house ("ACH") network.

1　　　　　　5.　　The method recited in claim 1 wherein the second information packet

2　is transmitted to the financial institution over a debit system.

1　　　　　　6.　　The method recited in claim 1 wherein the second information packet

2　is transmitted directly to the financial institution from the payment network.

1　　　　　　7.　　The method recited in claim 1 wherein:

2　　　　　　the account information comprises a primary account number ("PAN") for the

3　identified financial account; and

4　　　　　　the authorization information comprises a personal identification number

5　("PIN") assigned to the customer for accessing the identified financial account.

1　　　　　　8.　　The method recited in claim 1 further comprising crediting, with the

2　payment network, a loyalty program for the customer in response to execution of the Internet-

3　based financial transaction.

1　　　　　　9.　　The method recited in claim 1 wherein:

2　　　　　　the credential comprises an electronic file having encrypted content received

3　from the customer; and

4　　　　　　determining account information comprises decrypting the encrypted content.

1　　　　　　10.　A method for coordinating an Internet-based financial transaction

2　between an Internet merchant and a customer, the method comprising:

3　　　　　　receiving, with a payment network, a first information packet comprising an

4　electronic file having encrypted content and transaction information specifying at least a cost

5　of the Internet-based financial transaction;

6　　　　　　decrypting the electronic file, with the payment network, to recover a primary

7　account number ("PAN") that identifies a financial account maintained by the customer at a

8　financial institution and to recover a personal identification number ("PIN") assigned to the

9　customer for accessing the identified financial account;

10　　　　　generating, with the payment network, a second information packet

11　comprising the transaction information, the PAN, and the PIN;

12　　　　　transmitting, with the payment network, the second information packet to the

13　financial institution with a request to perform a debit transaction from the identified financial

14　account for the specified cost of the Internet-based financial transaction;

15   receiving, with the payment network, a response from the financial institution
16 indicating approval or denial of the debit transaction;

17   determining, with the payment network, whether to provide a guarantee of the
18 Internet-based transaction to the Internet merchant;

19   determining, with the payment network, whether to credit a loyalty program
20 for the customer; and

21   transmitting, with the payment network, an authorization code indicating
22 approval or denial of the Internet-based transaction.

1   11. The method recited in claim 10 wherein:

2   the first information packet includes an identification of the Internet merchant;
3 and

4   determining whether to provide the guarantee of the Internet-based transaction
5 comprises determining whether the Internet merchant is one of an identified list of Internet
6 merchants who request guarantees of all Internet-based financial transactions.

1   12. The method recited in claim 10 wherein determining whether to
2 provide the guarantee of the Internet-based transaction comprises determining whether the
3 transaction information is consistent with a predefined set of parameters.

1   13. The method recited in claim 10 wherein the first information packet
2 further comprises a request from the Internet merchant for the guarantee of the Internet-based
3 transaction.

1   14. A payment network comprising:

2   a communications device;

3   a processor;

4   a storage device; and

5   a memory coupled with the processor, the memory comprising a computer-
6 readable medium having a computer-readable program embodied therein for directing
7 operation of the payment network, the computer-readable program including:

8   instructions for receiving, with the communications device, a first
9 . information packet from the Internet merchant, the first information packet comprising a
10 credential assigned to the customer and transaction information specifying at least a cost of
11 the Internet-based financial transaction;

12   instructions for determining from the credential, with the processor,
13 account information that identifies a financial account maintained by the customer at a
14 financial institution and authorization information that allows debit access to the identified
15 financial account;
16   instructions for generating, with the processor, a second information
17 packet comprising the transaction information, the account information, and the authorization
18 information; and
19   instructions for transmitting, with the communications device, the
20 second information packet to the financial institution with a request to perform a debit
21 transaction from the identified financial account for the specified cost of the Internet-based
22 financial transaction.

1   15.   The payment network recited in claim 14 wherein the computer-
2   readable program further includes:
3   instructions for receiving, with the communications device, a response from
4   the financial institution indicating approval or denial of the debit transaction; and
5   instructions for transmitting, with the communications device, an authorization
6   code to the Internet merchant indicating approval or denial of the Internet-based financial
7   transaction in accordance with the response received from the financial institution.

1   16.   The payment network recited in claim 15 wherein the computer-
2   readable program further includes:
3   instructions for performing, with the processor, a risk analysis of the Internet-
4   based financial transaction; and
5   instructions for determining, with the processor, whether to provide a
6   guarantee of the Internet-based transaction to the Internet merchant based on the risk analysis,
7   wherein the authorization code further reflects whether the guarantee is
8   provided.

1   17.   The payment network recited in claim 16 wherein:
2   the first information packet includes an identification of the Internet merchant;
3   and
4   the instructions for determining whether to provide the guarantee of the
5   Internet-based transaction comprise instructions for determining whether the Internet

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6   merchant is one of an identified list stored on the storage device of Internet merchants who

7   request guarantees of all Internet-based financial transactions.

1   18.   The payment network recited in claim 16 wherein the instructions for

2   determining whether to provide the guarantee of the Internet-based transaction comprise

3   instructions for determining whether the transaction information is consistent with a

4   predefined set of parameters.

1   19.   The payment network recited in claim 16 wherein the first information

2   packet further comprises a request from the Internet merchant for the guarantee of the

3   Internet-based transaction.

1   20.   The payment network recited in claim 14 wherein:

2   the communications system is coupled with an automated clearing house

3   ("ACH") network; and

4   the instructions for transmitting the second information packet to the financial

5   institution comprise instructions for transmitting the second information packet over the ACH

6   network.

1   21.   The payment network recited in claim 14 wherein the instructions for

2   transmitting the second information packet to the financial institution comprise instructions

3   for transmitting the second information packet over a debit system.

1   22.   The payment network recited in claim 14 wherein the instructions for

2   transmitting the second information packet comprise instructions for transmitting the second

3   information packet directly to the financial institution from the communications device.

1   23.   The payment network recited in claim 14 wherein:

2   the account information comprises a primary account number ("PAN") for the

3   identified financial account; and

4   the authorization information comprises a personal identification number

5   ("PIN") assigned to the customer for accessing the identified financial account.

1   24.   The payment network recited in claim 14 wherein the computer-

2   readable program further comprises instructions for crediting, with the processor, a loyalty

3   program for the customer in response to execution of the Internet-based financial transaction.

1   25.   The payment network recited in claim 14 wherein:

2   the credential comprises an electronic file having encrypted content received

3 from the customer; and

4   the instructions for determining account information comprise instructions for

5 decrypting the encrypted content.